

Case Study: New Technology, New Media – New World

Overview

The following article is based on material taken from the online encyclopaedia called Wikipedia in October 2005. It is a clear example of how the world of publishing and broadcasting has been changed forever by the advent of new technologies.

Read the article carefully and consider the following questions while you go through it:

What is Podcasting?

What are the technologies that underpin Podcasting?

Who controls Podcasting?

What current channels of information and media will be affected by Podcasting?

Podcasting

Podcasting is a method of publishing audio and video programs via the Internet, allowing users to subscribe to a feed of new files (usually MP3s). It became popular in late 2004, largely due to automatic downloading of audio on to portable players or personal computers.

“Podcasting”, in its strictest sense, is distinct from other types of online media delivery because of its subscription model, which uses a feed (such as RSS or Atom) to deliver an enclosed file. Podcasting enables independent producers to create self-published, syndicated “radio shows”, and gives broadcast radio programs a new distribution method. Listeners may subscribe to feeds using “podcatching” software (a type of aggregator), which periodically checks for and downloads new content automatically.

However, since computer jargon is frequently misused, the word “Podcast” is frequently used to describe the posting of any link to a media-player-compatible audio file (typically MP3) on a website. Some radio personalities post MP3 versions of their shows daily, and even though these are simple download links, and not part of any subscription model, they are nonetheless typically referred to as “Podcasts”.

Most podcatching software enables the user to copy podcasts to portable music players. Any digital audio player or computer with audio-playing software can play podcasts. From the earliest RSS-enclosure tests, feeds have been used to deliver video files as well as audio. By 2005 some aggregators and mobile devices could receive and play video, but the “podcast” name remained most associated with audio.

“Podcasting” is a portmanteau misnomer that combines the words “broadcasting” and “iPod”. The term can be misleading since neither podcasting nor listening to podcasts requires an iPod or any portable player. Also podcasting does not involve broadcasting or sending out of audio, since citizens need to point software to XML-tagged file to pull it down to their computer or portable device.

Aware of that misleading association from the beginning, some writers have suggested alternative names or reinterpretations of the letters “p-o-d”, without winning much of a following. One little-used alternative is “blogcasting”, which implies content based on, or similar in format to, blogs. Another is “audioblogging”.

Ethics

Podcasting is just one example of a number of web based new channels that are emerging for the creation and distribution of knowledge and ideas. A key difference between these new channels and the ones with which our world is currently most familiar and comfortable (e.g. printed media & television), is that the people in control of the channels are often difficult, if not impossible, to identify.

These new media channels are presenting the opportunity for anyone with a voice to be heard anywhere within the global society without any prejudice in terms of censorship or editorial.

Whilst this development can be perceived as positive from many perspectives, it could be argued that there are considerable dangers in exposing our world to the ideas of anyone without any kind of check or balance. For example, if a television channel programmer decides to air a particular programme, there is normally an editorial process that the programme must pass through before the programme is broadcast. This process checks that the programme conforms to the standards that are deemed appropriate by the broadcaster and also the society within which the broadcaster operates.

With the new media channels this process is minimal or non-existent and the recipient of the broadcast is the Global Society. Thus the potential impact of misrepresentation or extremism is huge.

This fact provides us with a number of ethical problems such as:

- Who should seek to control these new media channels?
- How far should freedom of speech be allowed to go?
- To what extent is the validity of a source of information dependant on our ability to identify the author?

Technology

These new media channels have grown out of the technology underpinning the World Wide Web and have their roots firmly in Markup Languages of which HTML is probably the most well known and easily accessible. The development of XML and offsprings such as RSS, have changed the face of the World Wide Web from a static, page-based experience to a dynamic media-rich environment.

Users are now able to subscribe to information channels on the Web where information is syndicated. They can download enclosures via a software aggregator which in turn is freely available on the World Wide Web.

Hardware developments such as portable MP3/MP4 players, 3G phones, and wireless communications are currently revolutionising the distribution of media that is downloaded from the World Wide Web. By the time that you read this, many new developments will have occurred that will challenge still further our understanding of how information and media are created, collected and distributed.

Summary

The development of new Information Technologies has changed forever the way in which information and media are created, collected and distributed in the Global Society.

Technological developments of hardware are providing opportunities for people to engage with new sources of information and media. They are also allowing people much more freedom to choose what they read/watch/listen to than has ever previously been possible.

Whilst some of this is positive development, there are significant challenges presented to the Global Society as a result of this new Information Technology. Issues such as editorial, censorship and freedom of speech have become global issues.

Whether the development and changes to the world of publishing and broadcasting will be perceived as a good thing in the long term is a point for careful consideration and discussion.
